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A NEW SCHOOL
IN
AMERICAN SAMOA

BY
EDWIN R. EMBREE



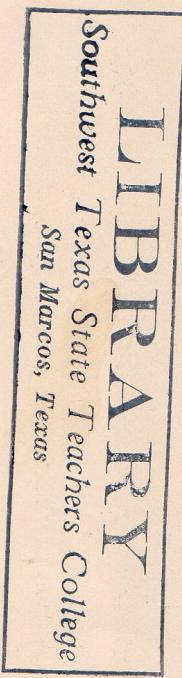
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from an etching by Hac Luquien
PALMS WAVE IN LEISURELY BEAUTY THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH SEAS

A COMMISSION went to Samoa in the summer of 1932, studied the people and the ways of life in these South Pacific Islands and made recommendations for a new kind of school. This educational enterprise may be significant not only for American Samoa but also for the one hundred and twenty million people, who, in the Pacific basin alone, are in a state of political dependence upon industrial nations and of tutelage from them somewhat similar to the condition of the Samoans. Heretofore schools among such people have been conducted either by missionaries, who were naturally out of sympathy with much of the native life and used education to inculcate adherence to a new religion and to the customs of the Christianizing nations; or by the foreign administrative authorities who established schools on European or American models regardless of the needs of these very different people. The new school proposed for American Samoa contemplates education for competence in native ways, while equipping a selected group of prospective chiefs and leaders with

Note. This is one in the series of occasional papers issued from time to time by the Julius Rosenwald Fund. It is not an official report of the Barstow Foundation but a personal interpretation of the problems faced and of the procedures proposed.

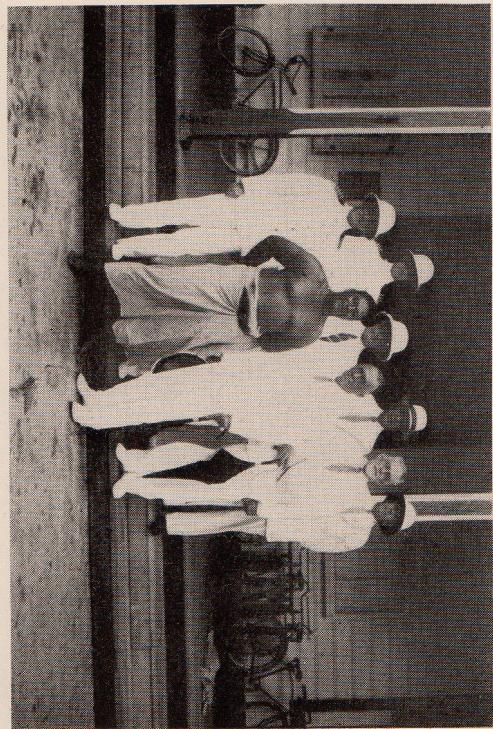
the fundamental intellectual tools of the modern world. In the new plans for American Samoa, education is considered solely from the standpoint of a people who, like millions of their fellows throughout the Pacific, are in the throes of radical change from primitive ways to the modern organized efficiencies of Western civilization.

The commission was sent out by the Frederic Duclos Barstow Foundation, a trust recently established by Mr. and Mrs. William S. Barstow, of Great Neck, New York, in memory of their son who had lived among the Samoans and had come to love them. The commission consisted of three trustees of the new Foundation, Albert F. Judd, chairman of the Board of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum and chairman of the Barstow Trustees; Walter F. Frear, attorney-at-law and formerly governor of the Territory of Hawaii; Frank E. Midkiff, president of the Kamehameha Schools of Honolulu; and Edwin R. Embree, president of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, who went as special advisor.

WHAT WE FOUND IN SAMOA

A small group of islands lying two thousand miles almost due south from Hawaii and on the other side of the equator, form the unit which is called Samoa. Two of these islands, Tutuila and Tau, together with some tiny islets adjoining them,

are owned by the United States. The remaining islands, formerly the property of Germany, are now administered by New Zealand under a mandate from the League of Nations. The population of



ON THE STEPS OF THE UNITED STATES ADMINISTRATION BUILDING,
PANGO, PANGO
THE BARSTOW COMMISSION WITH GOVERNOR-GENERAL LANDEN-
BERGER, THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS OF AMERICAN SAMOA,
AND CHIEF TUFULE, NATIVE ADMINISTRATOR OF MANU'A DISTRICT

American Samoa is slightly less than twelve thousand. It was for the education of the Samoans living in the American section that the Barstow Foundation was established.

Samoa is a country tropical in its climate and in

the abundance of its accessible foods and its ease of life; primitive in tools and material culture; highly organized in its ceremonial and social customs. The people have worked out ways of life admirably adapted to their environment which provide them with enough to suffice their needs and offer abundant satisfactions in personal and social expression.

FAA SAMOA

The ways which characterize Samoan life are grouped in the native term *faa Samoa*. This phrase includes the government by family and village chiefs, the primitive means of subsistence through a griculture and fishing, the simple commodious open houses, and the means of expression: especially the siva dance and the malanga, large festival visits from one village to another.

The most striking difference between Samoa and the Western nations is in the matter of tools. (In these Samoa is primitive indeed.) The natives have little more to work with than men had two thousand years ago in northern Europe, ten thousand years ago in China. A sharpened stick is the only farm tool; a crude stone adz the only cutting instrument; a canoe the only means of transportation; the weaving of rough fibers the only way of making cloth or mats or bedding. (Houses are built of

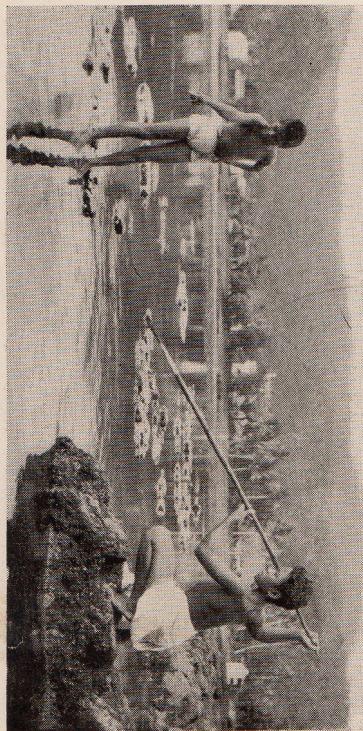
timbers hacked out with the stone adz and held in place by cinnet string woven from the tough fibers of the cocoanut.) On the eastern island of Tau and the neighboring little islets there has never been a wheel. No wagon or wheelbarrow or pulley—of course no motor—ever turns in this whole eastern district.

Even more than machines, Samoa lacks the formalized intellectual tools. (Unacquainted with any of the world languages, the inhabitants are cut off from the history and literature of their neighbors and are unable to make any direct and efficient connection with world thinking.) Lacking the concepts of mathematics and the formulations of science, they are unable to measure distances and forces or to ferret out the secrets of nature; in fact, are innocent of understanding that these secrets are obtainable and usable by man.)

Though primitive in the use of tools, Samoa is highly organized in social order, conventionalized and strict in customs and morals. (An elaborate gradation of social standing runs from highest chiefs down to untitled menials, an order which depends primarily on heredity but in which men and families move up or down the scale on current merit and achievement. Woven in and out through the village organization is an equally elaborate hierarchy of family chiefs.

It is an utter misconception to assume that such primitive groups are free and unhampered in their private lives or public relations. They are more tightly bound than we, both as to what must be done and what is *tabu*. (Any youth who breaks traditional laws may be punished physically by death or beating, but usually he suffers simply the dull pain of being ostracized.) If he oversteps even the customs of good form, his fellows draw away from him, his elders raise their eyebrows.) And one raised eyebrow of a high chief in Samoa is worse than a jail sentence in the West.)

Economics are on the basis of primitive communism. (Village gardens and community fishing supply food for all,) the labor and distribution being under the direction of the village and family chiefs.)



BOYS SPEARING FISH IN ONE OF THE BAYS WHICH DOT THE SEA COAST

[8]

No one is rich in the sense of owning property or stores of goods, but no able-bodied man or woman is devoid of useful employment and no one goes hungry so long as there is a mouthful to be passed around.)

Festivals and current pleasures are also on a communal basis. Almost every evening one of the village guest houses is the scene of *siva* dancing offered by the young people and attended with dignified approval by the elders and with gleeful imitation by the youngsters. *Malangs*, huge visits from one village to another, furnish much of the texture and color of social activity. Whole villages pack up and go to call on other villages. Often the trip continues for weeks or even months, village after village being visited, including those on islands sixty miles away which are reached only after two days' hard rowing over the open sea. On these festal *malangs* chiefs and young men and girls embark.) Arriving at a village, all is hospitality; the large open houses, the abundant food supplies ready on trees, and the simple ways of eating and sleeping make reception easy. Visiting chiefs meet with their resident equals in solemn *fono*—a glorious combination of parliament and talk fest—while the non-intoxicating *ava* flows in ceaseless ceremonial.

The young men and girls help heartily in the work of the village and fill the nights with song and dance.

[9]

Scrupulous observance of traditional law administered with a fine combination of severity, dignity, and courtesy, marks the life of the elders. Hearty labor on village tasks and simple daily joys fill the life of the young people.

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A SOCIETY IN TRANSIT

The Samoans would doubtless continue in their ancient ways of life satisfied and happy if they could remain untouched by outside forces. And if it were possible for them to live in isolation from the modern busy world, their friends would do best perhaps to leave them so, for there is little in the efficiencies of Western industrialism that is needed for successful life in tropical islands and little in the customs of Europe or America that seems superior to the life which the Samoans have built up for themselves over the many centuries in which they have existed in these remote and beautiful islands of the South Pacific.

But Samoa can no longer live to herself alone. Western civilization is already a powerful factor in her life and Western influence will increase with almost geometric progression during the decades immediately ahead.

Commercial intercourse will perhaps continue to be small since there is little arable land for the growing of commercial crops, and small natural

wealth in precious minerals or oil. But even without the urge of material gain the West is pressing upon Samoa in ways that will transform her life.

The islands are ruled by foreign industrial powers.

Administration by Western nations means inevitably the adoption of Western standards of public policy and only a little more slowly of personal and property rights and of public and private morals.

Missionaries have been active in Samoa for a hundred years and have produced the astonishing phenomenon of a people almost completely Christian in profession and in church membership. The introduction of Christianity carries with it regard for the customs and standards of the Christianizing nations. Not necessarily the ideals taught and practiced by Jesus and his early followers, such as primitive communism, non-resistance to outside force, brotherly love of all people, disregard of worldly treasure or of economic planning, which are strikingly similar to the pre-Christian ways of Samoa. Organized Christianity today gives little emphasis to these tenets which were expressed amid a primitive culture in the Near East two thousand years ago. Rather it reinforces the codes of the Western nations which are today its chief exponents and which naturally use the religion they have adopted to give a sacred sanction to their own ways of life. Almost fanatical respect for

private property, thrift and planning for the future, creation and hoarding of material wealth, conquest by force with elaborate preparedness for future wars, race pride and prejudice, monogamy, chastity and even prudish hiding of the body under comprehensive clothing—these ideals of the Western nations, quite as much as the teachings of Jesus, are driven home wherever Christianity is propagated.

Large steamships touch regularly and frequently at the port of Pango Pango, and others at Apia, the port of British Samoa. This means constant contact with the great world. It will inevitably mean a growing stream of tourists.

The moving and talking pictures are bringing the outside world, often in garishly alluring and exciting forms, to the attention of Samoan young people with a violence and disintegrating force that may be equal to all other factors put together.

Samoa no longer is able to live to herself alone. The problem for Samoa and her friends is how she can adjust herself to this new condition of active membership in a clamorous society of nations which has been thrust upon her after thousands of years of almost complete isolation due to the vast untravelled stretches of the Pacific Ocean.

The adjustment so far as anyone can see will have to come by the adoption in large part of the tools and organized efficiencies of the peoples who at

present rule the world—the powerful Western industrial nations. It is to be hoped that the adjustment may be slow and intelligent, that the Samoans may retain some pride and self-respect during the process by adherence to many of their own ways of life and by continued respect for their own ceremonial, social order, and means of self expression. While the Westernization of Samoa seems inevitable, adjustment to the modern world should come without complete disintegration of the Samoan personality during the transition period, without complete loss to the society of nations of the many beautiful ways of life now characteristic of Samoa.

THE SCHOOL IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

The school is the social instrument which may make intelligent transition possible in Samoa and in world society. The founders of the Barstow Foundation for American Samoa were wise to select education as the means of giving help to a people whom young Barstow loved. Happily the aid is offered at a time when this people are facing the most terrific problems of conflict, possibly of extinction, so far as their distinctive social customs and personal self-respect are concerned.

The problem before the Barstow commissioners was to devise a new kind of school which might or might not have any close resemblance to schools as

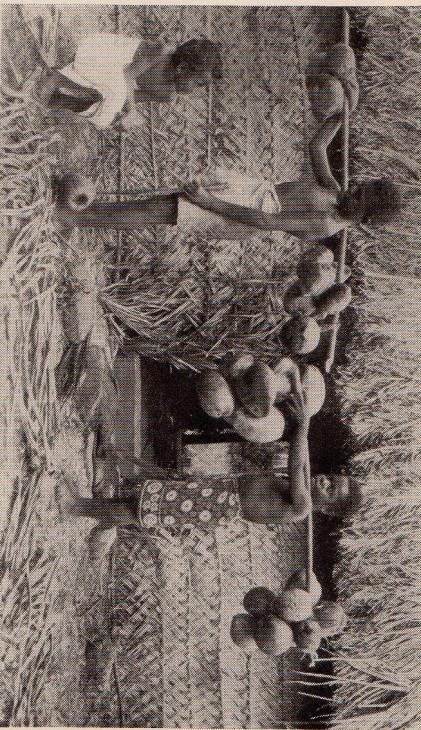
we know them elsewhere in the world, but which would accomplish the specific ends needed in this transition period in the life of a people who are moving over from primitive ways to close association with Western industrialism. The dual objective of the school in Samoa is to maintain respect for the ancient customs and competence in the ancient skills—since these give meaning and satisfaction to Samoan life—and at the same time to equip the new generations with the finest intellectual tools which mankind the world over has devised and perfected: language, number, science and its application, social institutions and their uses.

THE PROPOSED NEW SCHOOL

The commissioners acquainted themselves with life as it is in Samoa today and attempted to get an idea of the forces that are freshly pressing upon it. They talked over their tentative plans first with the chiefs of the villages and then with the American administrators. As a result of these studies and conferences, plans were drawn up for a school on a purely experimental basis in accordance with the following principles.

In the first place the commissioners frankly turned their backs on the American ideal of democratic education. The time is too short to give thorough understanding of the new ways to

CILDREN WITH LOADS OF COCONUTS, WHICH PROVIDE MUCH OF THE FOOD AND DRINK IN SAMOA AND THROUGH COPRA FORM THE ONLY COMMERCIAL CROP OF THE ISLANDS



the whole people and there is too much danger that undigested fragments of the new learning will simply corrupt the populace. If a small number of chiefs and leaders can be given a thorough understanding of Western ways and induced to retain respect and competence in their own customs, this small group can easily direct the course of the whole people. We agreed, therefore, to concentrate the efforts of the Barstow Foundation on a single school for a small number of prospective chiefs and leaders. The new Barstow school will offer a course of about three years for not more than eighteen young men who will be in residence during the entire

period. The institution will have not only class rooms but gardens and fisheries and facilities for arts and crafts. These will be used not for specific vocational training but for giving the students general skill in the handling of their native materials. The school will be a small community and will support itself through its own agriculture and fishing and handicrafts just as each village maintains itself in the primitive communism which characterizes Samoan life. Every effort will be made to maintain and glorify the native methods of self-expression. The *sva* dance will have something like the same place in student life that football or cricket or fencing has in American and European schools. The ancient ceremonials will be carried out with scrupulous regard for traditional propriety. It is hoped that the school will become something of an ethnological center through the collection of interesting objects of material culture and through (the writing down of stories, myths, and folklore.)

While the young men are spending much of their time in acquiring competence in their own folkways, they will be learning the fundamental branches of Western knowledge. They will be taught the English language so that they can communicate with their own present rulers and so that they can have at their disposal the literature and learning of the world. They will be given the

rudiments of mathematics in order to gain the concepts of measurement and precision. They will be introduced to science as a means of searching out the secrets of nature, and will be shown its applications, especially in experimental agriculture in their own gardens, public health, purified water systems, and protection from noxious vermin. They will be acquainted with the social institutions of the West so that they will have an understanding of the very different concepts in such matters as government, law, money, private property rights, and effective industrial organization, which govern the conduct of Western nations.

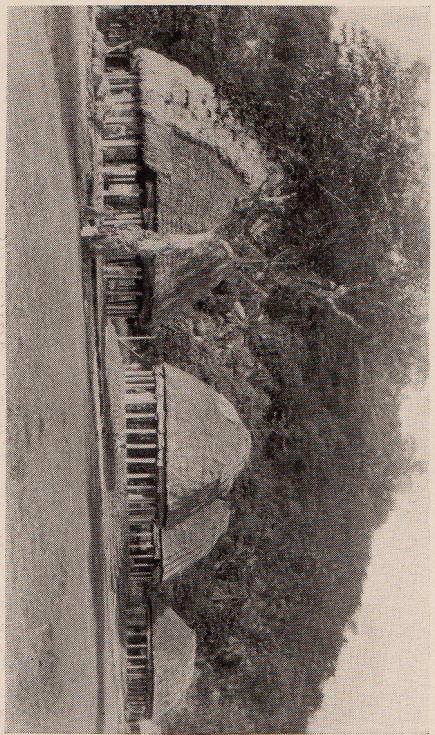
All these Western subjects are so new and strange to such a people that only by the greatest skill and diligence can a small number of young people be given an understanding of them in three years' time. For this reason the students are all to live in the school, and it is hoped that association with the teachers in common tasks and social intercourse will richly supplement the formal instruction in the class rooms. To this end it is proposed to have an American and his wife as principals of the school, while a Samoan and his wife will serve as co-principals (Samoan teachers will conduct many of the classes and direct the practical work.

One of the problems in any such school is to avoid detaching the students from their home

environment. It is easy for pupils, becoming vain of their new knowledge, to look down upon their fellows in the villages. And it is easy for the local chiefs to become disgusted at the newfangled manners of the pupils and refuse to allow them any part in village affairs. To avoid this it is proposed to have in the midst of the school course an externe year. Individual pupils are to return to their own villages at the end of their first or second year of schooling and serve for a period in the traditional duties of *mania*, young prospective chiefs. They will be accepted for continued residence in the school only on certificate from the local chiefs that they have fulfilled their functions faithfully and competently. It is realized that this will slow down the work of instruction. The duties of a *mania* are chiefly running errands, waiting upon the chiefs, and in general doing obeisance to the elders. But it is so important for the future leadership of the pupils that they keep in sympathetic relations to the village life that this externe year seems one of the most important in the program.

The new school, while not attempting directly the task of educating teachers, may well have significant influence on the developing school system. Under the administration of the U. S. Navy, by which American Samoa is governed, the beginnings of a system of elementary schools are

well under way in the principal villages. The Barstow School will probably help, as years go on, in the preparation of texts, in both Samoan and English, suitable for use in the primary schools; its graduates will probably be among the future leaders



THE *Fale* OF A SAMOAN VILLAGE
THE CLASSROOMS AND QUARTERS OF THE NEW SCHOOL
WILL BE OF THIS TYPE*

in education as well as in government; its methods if successful will quickly spread to other schools.

The school will represent a cooperative effort between the Barstow Foundation, the native chiefs, and the public authorities of the territory. The Foundation will furnish the salary and travel expenses of the foreign teachers and will provide the

equipment for instruction in modern subjects and the house in which the resident teachers are to live. The chiefs will furnish the land and gardens and through the carpenter's guilds will erect the school quarters and native residences. The school will be a part of the public administration of American Samoa and the funds for incidental expenses will be provided through the naval administrators from the public treasury.

The interesting plans for this new school will be successfully realized only if just the right teachers are found to direct it.